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NOTES ON SPANISH INTONATION.
BY- BERUMEN, ALFREDO
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A STUDY WAS MADE TO CONFIRM CERTAIN OBSERVATIONS ABOUT SPANISH INTONATION PATTERNS, ESPECIALLY THOSE THAT PRESENT A STRIKING CONTRAST WITH ENGLISH INTONATION PATTERNS. TWENTY-FIVE SPANISH SENTENCES ILLUSTRATING PARTICULAR INTONATION PATTERNS WERE PREPARED, AND 25 STUDENTS, WHO HAD HAD AN AVERAGE OF FOUR SEMESTERS IN SPANISH, RECORDED THEM. THE RESULTS OF THE EXPERIMENT NOT ONLY CONFIRMED THE INITIAL IDEAS ABOUT SPANISH INTONATION, BUT ALSO MADE IT POSSIBLE TO ARRANGE BY FREQUENCY THE PATTERNS THAT SEEMED TO BE LESS PERCEPTIBLE TO AMERICAN STUDENTS. THEY FAILED TO PERCEIVE, AND THEREFORE DID NOT STRESS, SUCH TONIC ELEMENTS AS THE FORMS OF "SER," INDEFINITE ARTICLES, THE IMPERSONAL "HAY," THE AUXILIARY IN PERFECT TENSES, SUBJECT PRONOUNS (ESPECIALLY THIRD PERSON), AND THE ADVERBS "NO," "YA," AND "MUY." ON THE OTHER HAND THEY SEEMED TO PERCEIVE AS TONIC SUCH ATONIC ELEMENTS AS THE FIRST OF TWO CONSECUTIVE CONJUNCTIVE PRONOUNS, THE ADJECTIVES "NUESTRO" AND "VUESTRO," "MI" AND "TU" IMPLYING CONTRAST, AND THE FIRST WORD IN SUCH PHRASES AS "EL QUE" AND "EL DE." (AUTHOR)

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NOTES ON SPANISH INTONATION

Alfredo Berumen

It has been said that we are deaf to sounds not found in our native tongue. The statement, of course, is an exaggeration. But it is a fact that every language has some sounds that are difficult to detect by most foreigners.

It took the writer of this article, for instance, a long time to distinguish between English short "o" and short "u". Words such as "robber" and "rubber", "cot" and "cut", sounded alike to him, and, of course, he pronounced them with Spanish "o". But this wasn't his only trouble. After he became aware of the existence of some of the English vowels, he had the task of learning how to articulate them and also of remembering which words were supposed to have which vowels. He made many mistakes, some embarrassing, others both embarrassing and amusing. He still remembers that one time he wanted to ask his landlady for his keys. He got mixed up with the vowels and uttered a short "i" instead of a long "e". You should have seen her face. He suspected there was something wrong with his pronunciation, and he spelled the word as fast as he could.

The Spanish language has a voiced "s", but it occurs only in especial positions and has no phonemic value, that is, it does not affect the meaning of words. For this reason most Spanish speakers are not aware of the existence of

FL 000 290

such a sound. And for the same reason this writer was unaware of the English voiced "s" for a long time. Words like "rise" and "rice", "disease" and "decease", sounded identical to him. Since in his English vocabulary there was no voiced "s", he has been trying for some time to learn the English words that have this sound.

In addition to a number of elusive sounds, the phonetic structure of languages has another element that, in this writer's opinion, is more difficult to detect, and that is intonation. If it took him long to perceive a number of English sounds, it took him much longer to discover that English intonation is in many respects quite different from Spanish intonation. In fact, he was simply not aware of intonation, English or Spanish. He mechanically fitted the English words into Spanish intonation patterns. For instance, Spanish stresses the second element of compound words. We stress "Rosa María", "guardabosques", "saltamontes", etc. The writer used the same stress pattern for similar English words or expressions. He used to stress "Rose Mary", "bodyguard", "grasshoppers", etc. The last word puzzled him for some time. The farmers of a school district where he taught were having some trouble with grasshoppers. People frequently talked about them, and so did he. But every time he did, people seemed to be amused.

The stress on the audio-lingual method brought about by World War II has let the writer to pay closer attention to intonation, especially to the Spanish patterns that present a greater contrast with the English patterns. However, he had never realized the linguistic effect of a correct intonation until his first flight over the Gulf of Mexico. Shortly after the plane took off from the United

States, there came from the loud speaker a very pleasing feminine voice giving safety instructions first in English and then in Spanish. The sounds were Spanish, but the intonation was English for the most part. On hearing those instructions, he had the impression of getting familiar material cast in an unfamiliar mold. In some of the expressions only the intonation was affected. It was said, for instance (Note: the slanted lines indicate stressed words; the curved lines indicate unstressed words),

"Estas instrucciones son una precaución. . ."
"Su chaleco está localizado. . ."
"Hay dos salidas en ambos lados. . ."

These intonation patterns seemed to clash with the ones a native would expect to hear, namely,

"Estas instrucciones son una precaución. . ."
"Su chaleco está localizado. . ."
"Hay dos salidas en ambos lados. . ."

In other expressions the intonation affected the meaning also. For instance, the young lady stressed

"para los niños" instead of "para los niños"
"de la ropa" instead of "de la ropa"
"bajo su asiento" instead of "bajo su asiento"

The first expression sounded like "!Para a los niños!" (Stop the children!); the second, especially since the speaker made a pause before and after it, means "Give the clothes", instead of "of the clothes" as was intended; the third, as it was stressed, means "I lower your seat", not "under your seat", which was what she meant.

Through time and experience, the writer has gathered some notes on Spanish intonation patterns, especially those that present a more noticeable contrast with English patterns. However, in order to have more concrete data, he had twenty-five of his students record twenty-five Spanish sentences, each illustrating a particular intonation pattern. The students had had an average of four semesters of Spanish. They were not told the purpose of the recordings; they were simply asked to read the sentences into the microphone the best they could. The results of these recordings not only confirm the writer's observations, but also they are very useful in pointing out the patterns that seem to be less perceptible to students, who, as is natural to expect, simply transfer to Spanish the corresponding English patterns.

Before presenting those results, it may be convenient to present a general view of the stressed and unstressed elements of the Spanish sentence.

Unstressed elements.

1. Definite articles: "Las rosas y los lirios se marchitaron".
2. Neuter article "lo": "No creo lo que me dicen".
3. Conjunctive pronouns: "Te llamé, pero no me oiste".
4. The relatives "que" and "quien": "Me gusta el joven que entró", "Nos llevará ese guía, quien es muy amable".
5. The possessive adjectives "mi", "tu", "su", "nuestro" and "vuestro": "Tengo tu retrato en mi escritorio", "Aquí nacieron nuestros padres".
6. Prepositions and conjunctions: "Estas flores son para ti", "Avísame cuando llegues".

Stressed elements.

1. Indefinite articles: "Ayer me visitaron unos amigos".

2. Possessives "mio", "el mio", "tuyo", etc.: "¡Cuánto tiempo sin verte, hijo mío!".

3. Demonstratives: "Nos veremos esta tarde".

4. Subject pronouns: "Ella baila mejor que tu".

5. Nouns, adjectives (except those indicated above), interjections: "Siempre recordare tu amable sonrisa", "Oh, señor, danos paz en nuestros días".

6. Verbs; in perfect tenses both the auxiliary and the past participle are stressed: "Tus hermanas son alegres", "Hemos perdido el tiempo".

7. Adverbs, except "como", "cuando", "cuanto" and "donde", unless they are in interrogatory or exclamatory expressions: "No creas lo que te dicen", "Ustedes son muy amables", "Los amigos ya se fueron". But "Este es el café donde nos reunimos".

The results of the students' recordings will now be presented. They show two types of intonation errors, namely, stressing elements that are supposed to be unstressed, and not stressing those that are supposed to be stressed.

I. <u>Not stressing elements that should be stressed</u>.

1. <u>The forms of "ser"</u>. We have a very striking finding in this category, which is the strong tendency students have to leave the forms of "ser" unstressed. Each expression is given twice, first with the correct stressing and then with the students' stressing. The numbers indicate the percentage of the students who made the error in question.

Lo que usted dice es muy extraño.
Lo que usted dice es (100) muy extraño.
Estos empleados son muy corteses.
Estos empleados son (95) muy corteses.
Usted es muy amable, señorita.
Usted es (85) muy amable, señorita.

El habla andaluza es pintoresca.
El habla andaluza es (80) pintoresca.
Trata bien al señor. Es el jefe.
Trata bien al señor. Es (69) el jefe.

It is obvious that most of these intonation errors are simply a transference of English intonation patterns. The verb "to be" is generally unstressed in English, and naturally students leave the forms of both "ser" and "estar" unstressed. In the last expression we find that "es" was left unstressed by only 69 per cent of the students. Perhaps the percentage would have been higher if the verb had not been in initial position.

2. Indefinite articles. Unstressing the indefinite article, so general in English, is naturally transferred into Spanish by English speakers. This is indicated in the following:

Unos amigos me invitaron a una fiesta.
Unos amigos me invitaron a una (90) fiesta.
Lupe es una muchacha guapísima.
Lupe es una (60) muchacha guapísima.

We see that in the first sentence the article was stressed correctly. Very probably it is due to the fact that the article is in initial position. On the other hand, the second article, located toward the end of the sentence, was unstressed by 90 per cent.

3. The verbal form "hay" . Only one sentence of this type was recorded, the result being as follows:

Aquí hay unos anillos muy bonitos.

Aquí hay (85) unos anillos muy bonitos.

The general tendency to leave this verb form unstressed might be caused by being subconsciously associated with "to be" in "there is", "there are", etc., in which the verb is usually unstressed.

4. Auxiliaries. For this pattern the following expressions were recorded:

Paulina ha visto nuestra casa.

Paulina ha (80) visto nuestra casa.

¿Has hecho lo que te mandé?

¿Has (48) hecho lo que te mandé?

This faulty stressing is, in the writer's opinion, very general among students. The fact that the second sentence has a rather low frequency may be due to the initial position of the auxiliary. It seems useless to remark that English speakers generally leave auxiliaries unstressed.

5. Subject pronouns. There is a rather strong tendency on the part of students to leave subject pronouns unstressed, as the following results indicate:

Lo que usted dice es muy extraño.

Lo que usted (74) dice es muy extraño.

Él vino de Jerez.

Él (53) vino de Jerez.

Él duerme cuando tu trabajas.

Él (37) duerme cuando tú trabajas.

Él habla de Andalucía.

Él (32) habla de Andalucía.

As it is well known, subject pronouns are usually omitted in Spanish; but they are expressed for clarity or for emphasis. In the third sentence most students seem to have perceived the implied contrast, and they stressed the subject pronouns as they would have in English. Although thirty-seven per cent did not stress "él", all stressed "tú". In the second and fourth sentences the pronouns are in initial position, and this may have kept the percentage down. It must be remarked that a correct stressing of "él" is often necessary for the speaker to be properly understood. Thus the second and fourth sentences with "él" unstressed would be interpreted to mean "The wine from Jerez" and "The speech of Andalucía" respectively.

6. Adverbs. Leaving adverbs unstressed is especially noticeable when the short adverbs "no", "ya", and "muy" are involved. Only expressions with "no" are presented here.

Él vino no me gusta.

Él vino no (48) me gusta.

Este guía no sabe inglés.

Este guía no (43) sabe inglés.

No veo ningún taxi por aquí.

No (43) veo ningún taxi por aquí.

II. Stressing elements that should not be stressed.

1. Conjunctive pronouns. English can stress direct and indirect object pronouns for emphasis, but Spanish intonation always leaves conjunctive pronouns unstressed. When emphasis is to be expressed, the prepositional forms are added. Students

usually follow the correct pattern when only one conjunctive pronoun is involved, but when two pronouns are involved, they have a strong tendency to stress the first, as the following expression shows:

Usted tiene los boletos; se los envié.

Usted tiene los boletos; se (95) los envié.

2. Possessive adjectives "mi", "tu", "su", "nuestro", and "vuestro".

Spanish does not stress these forms even when emphasis or contrast are to be expressed. In this case, as it is known, the above forms are replaced by the forms "el...mio", etc. Students seem to be inclined to stress the forms in question, but such inclination is very strong when the longer forms "nuestro" and "vuestro" are involved, as it is shown here:

Ayer os vi con vuestros padres.

Ayer os vi con vuestros (95) padres.

Paulina ha visto nuestra casa.

Paulina ha visto nuestra (95) casa.

Aquí están tus zapatos y los de Carmen.

Aquí están tus (37) zapatos y los de Carmen.

Luis, estamos en mi casa; no en tu casa.

Luis, estamos en mi (11) casa; no en tu (69) casa.

Stressing the possessive "tu" can in some cases bewilder the native listener. As an example, this incident may be mentioned: Our graduate department had a picnic at the country home of one of the teachers. He had a few donkeys, and it was decided to ride them. One of the students, making a remark about the donkey

the writer was riding, said "tu burro" stressing "tu". That meant to him "you, stupid", which very likely the student did not mean.

3. Definite articles. Although the definite article is generally unstressed in English, it can be stressed for especial connotation. This writer often hears a radio commercial saying "The (so-and-so) bread is the bread to buy", the second article noticeably stressed. Such intonation does not exist in Spanish. Students usually leave definite articles unstressed, as Spanish requires. However, they very frequently stress them when they are in groupings such as "el de", "el que", etc. The results of our recordings are as follows:

Aquí están tus zapatos y los de Carmen.

Aquí están tus zapatos y los (90) de Carmen.

Lo que usted dice es muy extraño.

Lo (64) que usted dice es muy extraño.

4. Comparisons. The general intonation pattern is not to stress "tan" nor "como". Occasionally a native may stress "tan", but he will not stress "como". A stressed "como" that is neither interrogatory nor exclamatory is mechanically interpreted by a native listener as the form of "comer", so that "como la tuya" pronounced with a stress on "como" means to him "I eat yours". The recordings are as follows:

Luis es tan amable como Pablo.

Luis es tan (74) amable como (69) Pablo.

Mi casa no es tan buena como la tuya.

Mi casa no es tan buena como (64) la tuya.

Notice the high frequency of the erroneous stressing of "tan" and "como" in the first sentence. For some reason or other "tan" was not stressed in the second sentence, at least not very noticeably.

5. Prepositions. Prepositions are never stressed in Spanish. In case of the preposition "de", it must be kept in mind that stressing it produces the effect of making it the subjunctive form of "dar". The phrase "de la tienda" pronounced with stressed "de" is interpreted by the native listener as "Give the store". Only in a few cases were the prepositions stressed by the students:

Ese señor es el dueño de la tienda.

Ese señor es el dueño de (116) la tienda.

No veo ningún taxi por aquí.

No veo ningún taxi por (16) aquí.

6. Conjunctions. Practically all the students tested pronounced the conjunction "que" unstressed, which is what Spanish intonation requires. However, the experience of the writer is that stressing this conjunction occurs more often than these recordings indicate. Stressing this "que" makes it mean "lo que". We have only one sentence for this pattern:

Ya te dije que no quiero.

Ya te dije qué (11) no quiero.

Before finishing, the following information may be added. It is commonly believed that Spanish people speak fast, especially in certain regions. The well known phonetician Tomás Navarro carried out an experiment, the result of which indicates that Madrilenians speak at an average speed of 332 syllables a minute. And the writer of this article found that the twenty-five students of one of his classes speak English at an average speed of 267 syllables a minute.

It is the hope of this writer that this article will be of some help to his fellow teachers and to all those who are interested in the Spanish language.

Alfredo Berumen

Louisiana State University

Baton Rouge, La.